

**Promoting Women's Awareness  
Towards Change in Nigeria:  
The Role of Literature**

by

**Lucia Emem-Obong Inyang**

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# Approval

**Name:** Emem-Obong Lucia Inyang  
**Degree:** Master of Arts (Communication)  
**Title:** *Promoting Women's Awareness towards Change in Nigeria: the Role of Literature*  
**Supervisory Committee:** Program Director: Yuezhi Zhao  
Professor

**Katherine Reilly**  
Senior Supervisor  
Assistant Professor

---

**Zhou Kui**  
Senior Supervisor  
Associate Professor  
The Institute of Communication  
Studies  
Communication University of China

---

**Date Defended/Approved:** August 7, 2015

## **Abstract**

This paper examines women's struggle to overcome marginalization in a sexist and a patriarchal Nigerian society. It argues that fictional literature can be an effective tool for creating awareness, learning and dialogue among Nigerian women from various cultural, religious and ethnic background towards transformation. Literature, like any medium of communication, can be used to mobilize social change. This argument is illustrated through a literary analysis of three novels by three renowned female Nigerian writers: *Efuru* (1966) by Flora Nwapa, *Second Class Citizen* (1974) by Buchi Emecheta and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The authors project womanhood in a positive light, upholding the potentials of women by making role models out of each female protagonist. Women's efforts to free themselves from the bondage of tradition, politics, marriage and most importantly male dominance are what makes these three novels extremely powerful. This paper intends to show how literature tries to open up the neglected subject of women oppression in Nigeria and create awareness.

**Keywords:** Nigeria; Literature; Novels; Women; Writers; Culture

*Dedicated to my mom who taught me how to love  
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# Chapter 1.

## Introduction

Literature as a major form of art can be defined as “spoken or written material,” meaning it is used to describe everything from “creative writing, to scientific or technical works” (Lombardi, 2010). But the term literature is frequently used to refer to works of creative writing or imagination, which includes works of poetry, drama, fiction and nonfiction. Literature can be defined as the body of written work of a language, a culture, an era or period of time, for example the literature of the life and time of the people of the Eastern and South-eastern Nigeria during the civil war between 1966 and 1970. It is a product of meetings, confrontation and a vehicle for communication (Culler, 2000).

A literary piece has the ability to prompt a reader’s empathy with the characters in a story, yielding emotional concern for the “actions, feelings and motivations of the people in the narrative” (Allen, 1988. P. 61). Although knowledge could be gained from anthropological studies and social science textbooks as well as historical books, the application of fiction is through a dramatic and entertaining approach which makes it unique. Art is a myth that helps us see the truth more plainly (Hernadi, 1978). Glen Warren writes that two prominent Greek writers namely Celsus and Lucian in their works have made use of literature to interpret and spell out truth. Celsus in *A True Discourse* and Lucian in *Imaginative and Stylish Satirist* both aimed at making their work entertaining but at the same time to “provoke some degree of cultured reflection” (Bowersock 1994, p. 2).

The purpose of this paper is to show that fictional literature tries to create awareness and improve dialogue among Nigerian women from various cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds towards transformation. For example, a writer may choose to use imageries to depict the characters in his or her book in order to direct the reader's attention to the themes of his or her work. This paper argues that literature plays an important role in creating awareness and empowering women towards social change in Nigeria. In studies of efforts to mobilize social change, the power of fiction is often ignored. This paper intends to explain the influence and value of fictional writing as a tool for advocacy and development.

For the purpose of this paper literature can be considered a form of research, information or historical illumination. The term "women" is used to refer to the female gender. Using three popular Nigerian literary novels, this paper illustrates the importance of fictional writing in shaping women to be influential in the community and the world at large. This is realized by discussing the central message or theme of these novels. The list of novels used are: *Efuru* (1966) by Flora Nwapa, *Second Class Citizen* (1974) by Buchi Emecheta and *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

One symbolic aspect of communication in Africa and in this case Nigeria is the oral tradition. According to Adeyinka Adedeji (1971), a Nigerian author and professor, oral tradition is a collection of verbal or spoken art created as a "means of recalling the past and based on the ideas, beliefs, symbols, assumptions, attitudes and sentiments of people" (p.134). Many Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta have made use of oral traditions in their works as it gives their writing a unique edge. Books are used as a way to communicate change to the general public. Fiction is both modern and traditional, modern in terms of written words and traditional in terms of storytelling (Allen, 1988).

Awareness in this paper stands for raising consciousness and change and implies transformation, development, and transition in all aspect of life; cultural, social economic, political, educational, and so on. This means that literature can be used as a psychoeducational device to change behavior or attitudes and in this case to build self-esteem in women. For example the colonial experience aroused literary works that instigated the consciousness of several African people towards the struggle for political and economic independence. Grace Okereke (1997), a Nigerian writer explains that the experiences of neoliberalism, capitalism and imperialism in Nigeria spawned Marxist literature, whose radical recognition educated the “resistance of the working class against the oppression of the ruling class” and also the effort of the lower class against the exploitation of the bourgeoisie (p. 28).

The traditional place of women in Nigeria, that places women as inferior to men, makes it difficult for women to participate in political, economic and social activities (Terry, 2007). While men continue to dominate political activities and benefit from economic power, women are relegated to the roles of housewife, child bearer and trader. This traditional place is changing because of the opportunities offered by storytelling as it exposes a culture of violence and gender discrimination against women (Tamale, 2004). For example, Buchi Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* (1974), a fictional novel based on a true life experience of the author herself, tells the story of a young girl named Adah who struggled against the cruelty of culture and society to find her identity. From her abusive husband, to her controlling in-laws she was determined to be successful. Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) illustrates the evolution that occurs when women are mindful of their strength. Like the character of Auntie Ifeoma whose house at “Nsuka started it all,” the Achike’s were able to find the courage to challenge their abusive father (Adichie, 2003). These stories matter because they aim to promote women’s awareness towards change by empowering them. When women are fully aware of their potentials they are prompted to tackle

issues like marginalization and gender inequality. This becomes a cornerstone for development in the country, the transformation extends to families, communities and future generations.

The '80s and the '90s have experienced an increased consciousness in gender related issues in Africa especially in Nigeria as it has developed a literary sub-culture that highlights and makes visible the “the female perspective hitherto subsumed” under the male viewpoint (Tamale 2004, p. 28). This had generated an attentive group of feminist Nigerian writers who use the characters, themes and plot in their stories to ask questions and mobilize awareness.

In what follows I development my argument. In chapter two I give a brief overview of Nigerian literature. Chapter two will also discuss Nigerian literature in the indigenous languages as well as in English language. This done to give us an idea of what literature in Nigeria is made up of. The third chapter discusses the coming of Nigerian women writers, their style of writing and a concise literary analysis of the three selected Nigerian literature text mentioned earlier. These analyses highlight the struggles encountered by the heroines in their pursuit of success and change. Chapter four examines how information from literature can be used to promote dialogue among Nigerian women, develop gender understanding and build women’s self-esteem. The fifth chapter summarizes the entire paper and offers concluding thoughts.

## **Chapter 2.**

### **Nigerian Literature**

This Chapter identifies Nigerian literature, the writers and the various time periods and generations they fall in. Nigerian literature was initially shaped by the oral tradition of storytelling. Gradually oral narratives were written in order to preserve culture but they were written in the indigenous languages of the people, as that was the language of communication at the time. Western imperialism and colonialism led to the birth of Nigerian literature in English. This chapter explores this process, and the recognition gained by Nigerian literature.

#### **2.1. Nigeria the Rich and Multicultural Country**

Nigeria's national borders were a result of Britain creating what had been "a shifting series of administrative regions" its Northern and Southern protectorates in the year 1914 (Grinwold 1992, p. 712). Nigeria as a nation was named by the fiancée of Lord Lugard, the first governor of the amalgamated colony. The name was in reference to the Niger River. Nigeria is located in West Africa, along the Eastern coast of the Gulf of Guinea and just North of the Equator. As a country it is blessed with multi-ethnic cultures each with their traditional languages, music, dance and literature. There are over 300-400 distinctive languages in Nigeria with about three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) and hundreds of minor languages. Nigeria's official language is English, the product of colonization by the British (Grinwold, 1992). Since Nigeria gained its independence in the year 1960, the country has suffered one civil war in the late 1960s, provoked by the secession of the Biafra state. There have also

been five successful military coups however Nigeria is currently in a democratic stage. Today, Nigeria is the wealthiest African nation thanks to revenues from oil exploitation (Adesanmi & Dunton, 2005).

## **2.2. Nigerian Literature in the Indigenous Languages**

One factor that influences Nigerian literature is the literature written in the indigenous languages of Nigeria. Some scholars strongly insist that original Nigerian literature is that which is written in the indigenous languages and that every Nigerian who writes fiction in English today has a foundation in the oral heritage of his or her ethnic group (Irele, 2001). Nigerian novels that are written in the indigenous languages are mostly written in the three major languages of the country, that is the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba language. It is very significant to note that the earliest form of indigenous novels in Hausa and Yoruba were initially written in Arabic and Roman script or a blend of both (Jeyifo, 1988).

From the early twentieth century, Christian missionaries arriving in Nigeria established churches in strategic states like Calabar, Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abia. The advancement of literature was shaped by missionary societies, particularly in the Western part of Nigeria as a result of the work of Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther who wrote in his native dialect (Aguwa, 1997). Pita Nwana published *Omenuko* in 1958, the first novel written in the Igbo language of the Nigerian people. Progressively the 1960s ushered in a series of creative works such as *Ije Odumodu* (1963) by Leopold Bell-Gam, *Isi Akwu Dara* (1965) by Uche Tony Ubesie and *Ala Bingo* (1968) by Achara. The Yoruba culture has a very energetic type of literature that dates as far back as the precolonial era. This may explain the relative popularity and reputation of Yoruba fictional writing. Nigerian literature written in indigenous languages is a mix of both cultural and traditional forms. Nigerian literature in indigenous language is a combination of

foreign and local elements in terms of characterization, structure, themes and setting (Soyinka, 1976).

### **2.3. Nigerian Literature in English Language**

Nigerian literature in English language has gone through a tremendous growth in the past years since its emergence in the country. Considering the numerous international awards received by writers, one can observe that this genre of literature has become globally accepted (Awoyemi-Arayela, 2013). Several factors have led to the birth of Nigerian literature in the English language, history being a major fact. After the Second World War that lasted from 1939 to 1945, there was an outcry for independence from Nigeria's colonial masters. Public figures like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Herbert Macaulay, Obafemi Awolowo and Dennis Osadebey played a significant role during this period. They rejuvenated and modernized the culture and ethnic values of Nigerians. They did this by encouraging the publication of literary works in daily newspapers, pamphlets and books (Dasylva, 1997).

Nigeria was colonized by the British and as a result, English is the official language of communication, prestige and higher culture in the country. It is the language of instruction in schools, offices, business and formal gathering. Literature in English was spawned by the matrix of influence administered by Western imperialism and colonialism and returnee slaves of Nigerian origin (Lindfors, 1982). Most of the Nigerians who returned wrote about their experience as slaves and as free slaves they were determined to share their struggle and benefits of Western civilization with the local community (Irele, 2001).

Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) was one of the first novels written by a Nigerian woman. Though written in English, Nwapa's fiction originates from Igbo

folklore. Many Nigerian novels have a central theme that focuses on cultural differences, urban versus rural life style and cultural imperialism. It should be noted that despite the continuous use of English language in today's literature, the Nigerian traditional knowledge still shapes the story telling (Achebe, 1958).

## **2.4. What is Nigerian Literature?**

Nigerian literature is a combination of both Nigerian literature in its indigenous language and Nigerian literature in English language. Literary traditions are frequently undergoing change. Literature, after all, is constantly expanding and changing, making the definition debated by readers and critics as well as the authors themselves. Critics alongside with literary scholars have defined literary tradition in Nigeria in opposition to colonialism and Euro-American literature, resulting in Nigerian literature being defined within certain historical periods or eras (Hewett 2005). Nigerian literature is any Nigerian literary piece of creative imagination that is written by a Nigerian (Awoyemi-Arayela, 2013). A Nigerian literary work is one that examines issues that affect Nigerians and shares a common consciousness, world-view and other traditional and cultural experiences. In other words the writer must share the same values and struggle as the Nigerian people for the writing to be genuine (Culler, 2000). For example the three female authors whose works are explored in this essay have done a great job in highlighting the social, cultural and political issues that make women vulnerable in Nigeria. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* exposes the struggle and hardship faced by most Nigerian women in the name of marriage.

First and foremost the Nigerian writer is a member of a community in which he or she taps from the richness and diversified culture of the country. An example is Buchi Emcheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie whose style of writing draws heavily from the oral tradition of the Igbo culture. They both incorporate folktales in their stories, highlighting community values such as

respect, marriage and tradition. They do this in both the content and the structure of storytelling (Emenyonu, 2000). However, Nigerian literature is also a combination of both foreign and local elements in terms of “characterization, structure, theme and ideology,” meaning that innovative writers have sought several ways to incorporate Nigerian oral tradition in to their writing to add a bit of African flavour to distinguish it from the Western style of writing (p. 68). A very noticeable example is in the setting, characterization, the use of proverbs, storytelling and themes. Nwapa’s *Efuru*, Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* and Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* have all made a conscious blend of this style of writing.

The Nigerian novel helps both Nigerians and foreigners to visualize the nation. The Nigerian writer is the cultural architect of this modern dawn; as Chinua Achebe (1994) writes, “morning yet on creation day” (p. 55). Some Nigerian writers like Flora Nwapa, Chimaamanda Ngozi Adiche, Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Amos Tutuola and many others have been recognized internationally particularly in regards to their description of colonialism, civil war, corruption, education, politics and tradition (Grinwold, 1992). The Association of Nigerian Authors have successfully defined Nigerian literature to Nigerians and the global, especially with their objective being “literature and nation building” (Awoyemi-Arayela, 2013).

A number of Nigerian publishers have assisted many writers in getting their works published. Flora Nwapa founded Tata Press, and she eventually became the first African woman publisher of novels, encouraging more Nigerian female writers and assisting them in getting published. Other examples include Promise Okekwe’s Oracle books, Hyacinth Obunseh’s Hybun Publications, Kachifo Limited, Evans Publishers Limited and Cassava Republic Press (Adesanmi & Dunton, 2005). Nigerian writers have been acknowledged for their hard work both in and outside the country. In 2001 Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* (2002) won the Caine Prize for fiction and also the Commonwealth First

Book Prize (African Region). Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), is a bestseller and was shortlisted for the Orange prize alongside with her second book titled *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) which was adapted into a movie and directed by Biyi Bandele (Felperin, 2013). International actors like Chiwetel Ejiofor, Thandiwe Newton, John Boyega and Anika Noni Rose were featured and the movie premiered in the special presentation section at the 2013 Toronto International Film Festival (Soffel, 2013). In 1983 Buchi Emecheta won the award for the Best of the Young British Novelists.

Three stages in Africa's history have played a role in making Nigerian literature what it is today and they are; "the age of anti-colonial struggle, the age of independence and the age of neo-colonialism" (Hewett 2005, p. 76). Kenneth Harrow also divides it into periods which he refers to as "thresholds of change" these periods are; "revolt" and "oxymoron" (Harrow 1994, p.26). Some critics have classified the Nigerian writers into three generations. The first generation are described as those whose works were published ahead and precisely after independence in 1960. They include those who provided a form for the discussion of the misrepresentation of Nigerians and Africans in texts, while calling for an end to colonial rule in the country. The exit of the colonist, Nigerian writers switched their central message to issues of politics, governance and corruption among political leaders in the country. This period witnessed publication of novels like; *No Longer at Ease* (1960) by Chinua Achebe, *Madmen and Specialist* (1971) by Wole Soyinka, *The Raft* (1964) by J. P. Clark and *A Man of the People* (1966) by Chinua Achebe.

The second generation of writers are those whose work came after the Nigerian civil war in the mid-1970s. They include Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan, Ola Rotimi and Tanure Ojaide. This group of writers wrote about the civil war, its effect and the recuperation of the country and citizens. The third generation of writers are classified as those published in the mid-1990s until today, and they include writers like Buchi Emecheta, Zainab Alkali, Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche,

Helon Habila, Sefi Attah and many others (Adesanmi & Dunton, 2005). The 1990s in Nigeria was a period commonly known for the structural and economic separation of military rule. The crisis unfolded in different sectors of the economy such as unemployment, academic strikes, police and military brutality, electoral trouble, lack of infrastructure and hardship. All of these factors were central themes reflected in the novels of the third generation. This period also witnessed the arrival of successful Nigerian women writers who have gained their own individualism beyond that of the previous generations (Nadaswaran, 2012). These women have proven to be unique by broadening their conversation to engage a large number of readers and the public.

## **Chapter 3.**

### **Literary Analysis of the Novels**

This chapter identifies three major Nigerian female literary writers who, through their writing, have been able to voice their opinion about the history of women's oppression in Nigeria. These works remind Nigerian women that they too can command respect and contribute positively to the transformation of the country. By advocating for women and lending them a voice through their stories they help to educate women and the public.

These novels communicate several points or themes to the readers, and this chapter endeavours to analyse those points. Serving as a collective eye for women, these writers compose the narrative of women within the domestic space because it is here that her existence is often questioned and usually deconstructed (Kelly, 1999). So they redefine the female gender within the economy portraying her as accomplished within the "micro-economy" of her home and the "macro-economy" of the nation (Okereke 1997, p. 29). By composing new emancipating tales about women and their abilities they help to liberate them from the identity limits of Nigerian society. This style of writing, which portrays women as strong, independent, courageous, industrious and affectionate, has challenged women to greater heights in all aspects of life, starting a conversation about gender and making gender the center of discourse even beyond the academic field, which was not the case a few years ago (Silva, 2004).

### **3.1. Nigerian Women Writers of the Third Generation Speaking Out**

To understand how and why Nigerian women write what they write, it is very necessary to consider and examine their history. There are certain marginal, cultural and gender boundaries that have positioned and silenced women in Nigeria. The third generation of writers have been able to break the silence by revisiting and addressing these boundaries in a captivating manner. By breaking the silence of women in Nigeria through fictional writing, Nwapa, Emecheta and Adichie have made a name for themselves and have created a milestone in African literature (Nadaswaran, 2012).

The arrival of Nigerian female writers like Flora Nwapa in the '60s, Buchi Emecheta in the '70s and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in 2003, was to speak out and correct the misrepresentation of womanhood in literature and the country at the time. This group of writers aim to prove that women are relevant to the society and in particular, that Nigerian women are independent individuals (Mekgwe, 20008). They provoke a revolution such that women are not minor but are respected and treated as equal citizens in all aspect of life (Beasley, 1999). For a long time Nigerian women writers have not been presented in literature, their works were excluded from Nigerian literacy. Brown (1981) writes that they were considered the "other voices, the unheard voices," rarely discussed (p. 3). As a result of this Nigeria was considered a "male-oriented" society and this determined what constituted the Nigerian literature at the time (p.5). One factor responsible for this marginalization among women was that women did not have the same educational opportunities with men (Silva, 2004). Carole Davis argues that African women struggle with all forms of oppression like colonialism, western imperialism and cultural brutality. All these oppression contribute to denying African women access to education (Davis, 1986).

Since Nigerian women's voices were unheard in the past, their identity in the precolonial as well as the colonial periods were mostly determined by Nigerian men who wrote the Nigerian literature from their own perspective, illustrating the experience of women in the country (Silva, 2004). The three novels to be discussed in this paper are well-known works in Anglophone African literature as well as Nigerian literature. These stories aim to show the society a different status of women in Nigeria. The purpose of this is to restore the dignity of Nigerian women through these tales and the recreation of precolonial social, political and religious institutions (Achebe, 1958).

The female authors selected engage in numerous discourses, which give voice to their work. They are conscious of the challenges Nigerian women face and use their work to create awareness (Ogwude, 2011). In creating awareness for women, these novels deconstruct stereotyped images of Nigerian women and expose the various forms of oppression that women suffer. The first urgent move towards empowerment for Nigerian women is the "demystification of certain male stereotypes" of Nigerian women as "goddess or as supreme mother, self-sacrificing and suffering willingly and silently" (Silva 2004, p. 4). A Nigerian woman is often identified as the fertile "mother of the nation." This mystification is due to the relevance of motherhood in Africa. This theme is of extreme importance and is often present in most of the works of female writers as they use it to show the value of women (Oculli, 1976). This consistence and style of writing used by these three authors has allowed their novels to flourish. It has also forced people to think of ways to address certain social and cultural issues affecting women, while also seeking ways to empower Nigerian women (Griswold, 2000).

### 3.2. What is Literary Analysis?

A literary analysis examines the parts of a literary work to see how they produce the whole. Literary analysis focusses on how and why plots, structure, theme, character, setting, diction and many other technique are used by authors to create meaning (Hepburn, 1958). As with any type of analysis, literary analysis requires the breaking down of the subject into components, to enable better understanding. For instance an analysis of a novel may deal with the various characters or the relationship between the characters and the theme. Literary analysis might also identify a particular theme like the theme of silence and freedom in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, and show how the writer unfolds the subject or theme from the point of view of the story's narration. Or in the case of Nwapa's *Efuru* how the main character's attitude towards life is revealed through dialogue and actions.

The goal of literary analysis is to discover what makes these stories influential. It encourages readers to begin to think about why literature works through conversation, how literature studies and represents different worlds. Literary analysis achieves this goal by opening new ways of thinking for readers as well as increasing the understanding of various perspectives of literature. It helps readers develop critical thinking skills and helps gain a higher level of cognitive thought by evaluating what the writer says (Lynailou, 2010). Everyday there are decisions to make and problems to solve that require critical thinking. Critical thinking can be defined as acceptable reflective thinking that is focused on deciding what to believe or do. Critically thinking can be applied to events and people's actions, just like in literary analysis (Comeyras, 1989).

I will now turn to a literary analysis of *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, *Second Class Citizen* by Buchi Emecheta and *Purple Hibiscus* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.

### **3.2.1. Flora Nwapa's Style of Writing**

Nigerian women's literature originates with Flora Nwapa and Nwapa was the first African woman to be published internationally. With the characterization of her female protagonist, she initiates a protest against the misrepresentation and generalization that Nigerian women are either wives and mothers or rebellious girls (Umeh & Nwapa, 1995). Nwapa's stories produce a Nigerian female with a classic charisma and a positive attitude that defines her. Shalini Nasaswaran (2012) writes that, using her knowledge of Nigerian oral tradition she experienced while growing up, Nwapa incorporates anecdotes of female characters "through an African woman's eyes" and offers a present-day narrator (p. 147). She is best recognised for recreating life and traditions from a woman's viewpoint. Her study of the female ego connects her works theoretically and thematically with other female writers like Buchi Emecheta and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie to name only a few (Nwapa, 1966).

#### ***Summary of Efuru***

Efuru, a young teenage girl, falls in love with Adizua, a poor farmer who is unable to pay her bride price. Ignoring tradition, Efuru elopes with Adizua, making her father very upset. He sends the elders of the village after her yet she refuses and insists she is happy and doing well. At the early stage of her marriage she is glowing and joyful. After a year she is blessed with a child but suddenly, her husband begins to keep late nights and sometimes he would not come back home. She makes an effort to work on her marriage but to no avail. Not long after, Adizua elopes with another woman and this is the beginning of Efuru's agony.

While her husband is away with another woman, her only child Ogonim takes ill and dies. Efuru buries her daughter without her husband at the funeral. Humiliated and ashamed she moved out of her husband's house back to her father's house and later remarries another man named Gilbert. Unable to give

her new husband a child, she marries another woman for him. Gilbert treats her in the same manner as Adizua, abandoning her when she lost her dad. He accused her of adultery and infecting him with her illness.

Fortunately, Ajanupu, Adizua's aunt takes Efuru to the hospital where she is treated and cured of her illness. Efuru again moves out of Gilbert's house to her late father's house where she devoted her time serving the lake goddess, Uhamiri and catering for her community.

### ***The Theme of the Industrious Nature of Women***

Women's economic independence is one of the most obvious themes in the novel. Just like in typical Igbo community, women are traders and the author puts trading in the hands of women. Men do not appear to have the energetic skill for trading. "Adizua was not good at trading it was Efuru who was the brain behind business" (Nwapa 1966, p.36). Efuru is not the only trader; there are a number of other women in the novel whose "hands make money" (p.37). In the traditional Igbo society, women did a lot of trading, farming and raising livestock giving them economic independence. Women also had little organizations that they belonged to, in which they come together to share their opinion and give each other assistance. These organizations vary depending on one's occupation, for example the Market Women Organization, August Meeting, Wives and Mothers Association and Farmers Women Association (Hogan, 199). This is an important quality because in liberating women one has to seek ways to make them financially independent. Also because it allows women to assist each other, which brings about growth. Ajanupu, Efuru's sister-in-law is also an industrious woman, but she is more concerned about traditional knowledge relating to women's health and wellbeing. She is identified as "a strong women" who "delivered seven of her children herself" (p.25). Ajanupu was the first person to notice when Efuru was pregnant and when the child was born she acts as the midwife. She always provides Efuru with traditional herbs anytime she is ill.

Nwapa uses the character of Efuru to deliberately debunk the assumption that Nigerian women are worthless or unintelligent. Despite Efuru's circumstance, she is described as not only enterprising but also charitable. Efuru is called a "remarkable woman, not just because she is "from a distinguished family" but because "she is distinguished herself" (p.1). She was able to raise money within a short period of time to give her husband for her bride price. Efuru is portrayed as a feminist in this novel because she knows her right and will not be deprived of it. When her first husband Adizua, left her for another woman, Efuru informs her mother-in-law that she "will not stay in Adizua's house" because he does not want her anymore (p.109). It is very rare in a typical Nigerian culture for a woman to walk out of her marital home. Not only did Efuru move out, but she remarried. Efuru from the beginning of the story breaks tradition, especially traditions that affect women. The story begins with her choosing her own husband and marrying him without seeking permission from her father and without her husband paying a dowry. She walks out on both marriages when they didn't work out and finally she decides to give back to her community by helping other women.

### **3.2.2. Buchi Emecheta's Style of Writing**

Buchi Emecheta's works depict strong female characters from the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial time frame. They scrutinize the various changes and obstacle experienced by Nigerian Igbo female characters. The defined role of women as wives and mothers are subsequently changed when faced with difficulties (Nadaswaran, 2012). While educating readers about the Nigerian culture, she also exposes the inhumane systems preserved by Nigerian culture. Most of Emecheta's personal experiences are reflected in her stories as she uses them to confront female enslavement. One unique aspect of Emecheta's writing is in her use of cultural practices that affect women, such as widowhood, girl child education, child marriage and polygamous marriage. Using

the character of a young female, she shows how the traumatic experience does not hamper this young character but rather teaches her to grow in to a matured, strong and selfless woman. Emecheta stresses Nwapa's opinion that there are other opportunities for women other than wives and mothers (Philips, 2006).

### ***Summary of Second Class Citizen***

*Second Class Citizen* is about the struggles of a woman called Adah Ofili. The story informs us about Adah's marriage, her dreams, and her pursuit of survival as she grows into a woman. Born in Lagos State, Nigeria, after the Second World War, all she could think of was going to school. However, she was not allowed to gain a formal education because "she was a girl who had arrived when everyone was expecting and predicting a boy" (Emecheta 1974, p.1). Since "she was a disappointment to her parents and her immediate family" sending her to school was considered to be a waste (p.3).

When Adah's dad falls ill and dies, her mother is inherited as a wife by her father's brother. Her brother is asked to live with one of her father's cousins and she is sent to live with one of her mother's brothers. She never gives up on her dream of getting an education and moving to the United Kingdom. She is very persuasive and is able to talk her uncle into sending her to school, which he eventually accepts "because education would bring a higher bride price" for Adah (p.57). Suitors come for her hand in marriage but she is not interested in any of them, rather she is fascinated by the opportunities that comes with education.

Adah is very aware that she will not be allowed to further her education abroad. Therefore, she marries a student, Francis Obi. Francis is too poor to pay the bride price or start a family. But it is Adah's hope that she will be able to attend school and study in her own time. She gives birth to her daughter and gets a job with the American Consulate Library. She shares her dream of moving to the United Kingdom with her husband and they decide to go together. But Francis' family disagrees to Adah leaving because they all depend on her salary.

After some years Adah convinces her in-laws that her husband wrote to her, asking her to join him because life is tough and he needs her assistance. They finally agree and she joins her husband in the United Kingdom.

### ***The Theme of Determination to Succeed***

Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* confirms African beliefs and practices that oppress women such as the belief that only a male child is expected to get a formal education and also a woman without a male child is less of a woman. Adah the main character in the novel was not "quite sure that she was exactly eight, because she was a girl" and since she was considered a disappointment "nobody thought of recording her birth because she was so insignificant" (Emecheta 1977, p.1).

But Adah is a focussed, intelligent and determined to succeed in life. For instance, when she could not afford her exam fee, she "buried the money for meat "and went back home" knowing "it was going to be alright" (p.72). She is aware that education would make all her dreams come true, so she did not mind the consequences of withholding the money rather, she was very pleased "she had earned the two shillings" (p.23). The author instructs women never to accept the role of a second class citizen, the inferior position given to women by tradition and society. This is demonstrated through Adah's tough character and especially her attitude towards inferior things. She refused to attend any "other high school than the Methodist Girls High School" which is one of the best schools and the school of her dreams (p.53). She got a first class ticket to the United Kingdom for herself and her child. Even when she was told in the United Kingdom that the kind of job she wants cannot be given to her because she is a second class citizen she insisted that she is highly qualified for it and eventually her request was granted.

The "innocent Adah who came to London a year previously had become so clever" getting family planning to protect her health and future (p.160).

Emecheta portrays a female character who challenges tradition and knows exactly what she wants in life. She refuses to live under the shadow of anyone, not even her husband Francis. Adah regardless of her dreams and aspiration was still a submissive and loving wife. From her little salary she paid “for Francis’ course, his examination fees and school book” (p.62). Emecheta strongly believes that women can be successful, empowered and still respect their husbands.

### ***The Theme of Enslavement of women in Marriages***

The African tradition teaches women to shrink themselves while reminding them constantly to always aspire to marriage. Adah knew that the only way she would leave the country to further her studies abroad was by marrying Francis. She was only sixteen when she married her husband. Adah is loved by her in-laws mainly because she pays their bills and is seen as a baby factory. A woman must have children, as many as her husband wants, because “she would be forgiven everything as long as she produces children” (p.28).

Francis controlled everything including Adah’s salary and was often threatened by her success. He did not want Adah to work at the American Consulate Library because “her pay will be three times his own and his colleagues at work would laugh at him” (p.26). When Adah got family planning he accused her of prostitution and beat up claiming “she could take other men behind his back” (p.160). Most Nigerian women are enslaved in their marital homes because it is assumed that “men never do wrong, only women” that is why “they have to beg for forgiveness” from their husbands even though they are not at fault (p.170). The concept of bride price makes things more problematic because it is assumed that women are “bought, paid for and must remain like that, silent obedient slaves” (170).

Francis beats his wife, he burns her manuscript and forces himself on her sexually. But “how could Adah protest to a man who was past reasoning”, the

whole “process was an attack, almost a rape” (p.43). Again the Nigerian marriage puts her in a defenseless position. Adah tries to talk to Francis at night to get a job. He gets very angry with her because nights are “moments when Francis was pressed with desire for her.” She reluctantly accepts his advances because “otherwise it would result into blows” (p.95). Francis towards the end of the novel denies Adah and the children, leaving Adah to take full responsibility for the children and herself.

Adah’s mother after the death of her husband married her brother-in-law as demanded by tradition.

### **3.2.3. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Style of Writing**

Adichie’s writings pay reverence to Chinua Achebe, one of the forefathers of Nigerian literature. She also challenges and objects to some of Achebe’s representations of Nigerian traditions and women. Adichie amends and improves on Achebe’s style of writing in many ways. Adichie takes one of Achebe’s themes, the disintegration of family, culture and community. She composes her stories around the figure of an abusive and a domineering father. Her novels often explore how this father’s bossy quality becomes a flaw that leads him to harm his family. She studies the relationship between Christianity, culture and patriarchy and its effect on women (Hewett, 2005).

Adichie’s most compelling change is in her narrative technique, her use of first person point of view (Hewett, 2005). Through the eyes of the first person point of view in the novel *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili, the main character, tells a story of her unstable family. We also understand how uncontrolled power can cause both physical and psychological destruction (Adichie, 2003). *Purple Hibiscus* explores the social context of physical abuse, a topic that is rarely discussed in Nigeria. Kambili presents her wealthy but troubled family to the readers. As the story unravels we begin to see the daily affairs of their tortured

lives, their mother's multiple miscarriages and Jaja's twisted little finger remain unspoken secrets. These unspoken secrets are shared between Kambili and her brother Jaja through stolen glances and flashbacks.

### ***Summary of Purple Hibiscus***

*Purple Hibiscus* introduces us to the character of a teenager, fourteen year old Kambili, who is the narrator. We watch her family breakdown in a country that is doing the same. Like many post-colonial countries undergoing a radical change, a military coup takes place early in the story. Kambili, is the obedient daughter of a rigid Roman Catholic patriarch, Eugene, a wealthy business man in the city of Enugu. He is the CEO of a newspaper company where he boldly supports freedom of speech against the military regime. Yet he controls his family with an iron hand, punishing them when they fail to live up to his unreasonably high standards. Eugene is pictured as a troubled man struggling with his own demons who transfers his aggression on his family whom he loves. Kambili at one point explains that it was "as if something weighed him down, something he could not throw off." This self-made and rigid man is the book's loneliest character (Adichie 2003, p. 17).

The novel paints an image of the modern Nigeria, describing a land full of possibilities with an educated middle class—a country where its citizens are aware of the nation's flaws but yet they are patriotic and cannot speak out of a tradition of fear. Adichie writes that Kambili is a quiet child: "when she tries to speak, she often stutters or has a coughing fit." The rigid life that is shaped by her father renders her mute (p.25). This rigid lifestyle of Eugene affects his wife and daughter as he is often very abusive towards them. Adichie makes the character of Auntie Ifeoma, a widowed university professor, symbolic of efforts to bring change. Although she is Eugene's younger sister, her household is the opposite of her brother's. She successfully raises her three children Amaka, Obiora and Chima with what little she has. Her family is happy, her children are

free and she encourages them to question authority. Auntie Ifeoma's house in Nsuka stands for freedom, growth, peace and identity. Kambili and her brother Jaja communicate through their eyes as they are afraid of their father and admitting the truth about their situation. Their mother Beatrice just like them cannot speak freely in her own home, it is only at Auntie Ifeoma's house she can be her true self.

The author's main strength is in the way she creates a compelling dialogue between her characters. One can hear and imagine the context in which she writes, making use of descriptions to back up her story. The voice of the narrator sometimes sounds like a naive child struggling with her identity, although at times, Kambili can sound very mature. This is particularly true as she narrates her crush on a virtuous Catholic priest, Father Amadi. Overall *Purple Hibiscus* is a tale told by a young female voice with a much positive potential for the future.

The themes in the novel open its readers to debate about hardships faced by women in Nigeria. On continuation I look at two of these: domestic violence and religion, and silence and freedom.

### ***The Theme of Domestic Violence and Religion***

Women are often at the receiving end of cruelty perpetrated by men, religion and society. Within the first chapter of the novel, the theme of domestic violence and religion has been introduced. This chapter is titled "Breaking Gods", giving readers a reason for concern and showing how disturbed the Achike family is. The first sentence of the novel reads: "things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagere" (p.1).

The family of Eugene Achike as pictured in the novel leaves us with a lot to admire and also reconsider. Eugene and his family always sit in the front row, receive communion first, and are known for giving the biggest donations, buying

the most communion wine and paying all major expenditures of the church. Father Benedict also mentions how Brother Eugene's paper, *The Standard*, campaigned and spoke for truth, justice and freedom of speech. The Amnesty World thought it fit and legitimate to confer on him the human rights award in recognition of his hard work. Yet in his home, disturbingly, there is no freedom. He is authoritative and breeds "fear of physical assault and injury" on his family (p.7). Kambili struggles to reconcile her father's public persona with his private self. She gives an account of the three times he punishes her, each intensifying and prompting the reader's sympathetic response.

The first time as the furious Eugene raises a belt to flog Kambili, her mind jumps and she begins to imagine a scene she has witnessed several times. She watched the Fulani nomads, white jellabas flapping against their legs in the wind, making clucking sounds as they herded their cows across the roads in Enugu with a switch, each smack of the switch and precise. Papa was like a Fulani nomad although he did not have spare, tall body as he swung the belt at Mama, Jaja and me, muttering that the devil would not win (p.102).

Kambili compares the beating from her father with the beating giving to cattle by a Fulani nomad. Eugene tells them the violence he inflicts on them is for their own good and this has rendered them mute. The second time, Kambili is tortured again for spending time with her grandfather, Papa Onukwu, who is a traditionalist. Eugene pours boiling water on her feet as a way of teaching her not to "walk into sin" (p.194). Kambili again narrates the scene saying:

I wanted to say yes Papa, because he was right, but the burning on my feet was climbing up, in swift courses of excruciating pain, to my head and lips and eyes. Papa was holding me with one wide hand, pouring the water carefully with the other. I did not know that the sobbing voice, I am sorry, I am sorry was mine until the water stopped and I realized my mouth was moving and the words were still coming out (p.194).

The excruciating pain felt by Kambili made her think she deserves the pain, an experience shared by many victims of torture. Elaine Scarry (1985) argues that torture is "world destroying in the most literal way possible" because in that moment one psychologically and physically "ceases to exist" (p. 30). That

explains why Kambili is barely conscious of herself or what she says. She is fully subjected to her father, she believes she deserves to be punished and that her father's torture is for her own good. After all, her father "cannot be wrong because he is like God" and is always correct (Adichie 2003, p.196).

After visiting Auntie Ifeoma in Nsuka, Kambili was a changed person, who could differentiate between good and bad. She withstands her father's abusive acts, she was now the unbothered Kambili. Eugene attacks his daughter again for the third time when he saw a portrait of Papa Nnukwu with her. The picture symbolizes the growth of Kambili, because the naive little Kambili would never have a picture of her heathen grandfather. Her father destroys the painting and strikes her. She refuses to give in, she clutches at the pieces of the painting and refuses to obey his orders to get up off the floor, even as he kicks her. Rather she "curled" herself "tighter around the pieces of the painting" as she imagines the kicks combining with her cousin's "afro beat music" (p.211). The scene exhibits Kambili's reassessment of traditional Nigerian culture, which is exactly the author's message. Certain traditional Nigerian culture are humiliating and harsh towards women. The pain should motivate women to speak out and take a stand in the country.

Beatrice, like her daughter Kambili, is not excluded from Eugene's "holy discipline." Beatrice tells Kambili that she is pregnant, also mentioning that she miscarried several times after Kambili was born. One feels extremely upset when Beatrice recounts her husband's brutality to daughter telling her: "you know that small table where we keep the family bible, nne? Your father broke it on my belly. My blood finished on that floor" (p.248). Eugene beats his wife causing a miscarriage and each time it happens he makes his children say a special novena prayer for their mother's forgiveness, insinuating they are at fault and he is the sane person trying to lead them through the right path. Because Beatrice has not been liberated she believes it is her fault, she thinks it is just and cannot see herself living outside her marriage.

### ***The Theme of Silence and Freedom***

The purple hibiscus flower is a rare plant that takes a lot of time and attention to grow but when it eventually does it flourishes, just like Kambili and her family. The story illustrates the silence and a battle for resistance in the lives of Nigerian women and in this case Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice their mother. The novel begins with all three characters voiceless. But soon all of them find their voice, each in their own different ways. Eugene intimidates his family through constant violence and oppression. Eugene represents the oppressive nature of Nigerian culture. His wife and children are silent spectators of their own exploitation. Kambili describes how mute her family can be as she explains how the steps,

...on the stairs were as measured and silent as our Sundays: the silence of waiting until Papa was done with his siesta so we could have lunch...the silence of driving to the church for benediction afterward. Even our family time on Sunday was quiet... (p.31).

This passage suggests the helplessness of Beatrice and her children. However, Sereena Subba (2014) argues that Beatrice represents Nigerian women who are products of multiple subjugation, such as “patriarchy, tradition, colonialism and gender imperialism” (p. 185).

Kambili’s silence is out of fear, she fears her father’s reprisals when she tries to speak, her “throat tightens and words will not come out” (Adichie 2003, p.49). She does not associate with her classmates at school and they think she is a snob. She suffers from the inability to express her feelings. I am “sorry your figurines broke Mama” those were the words that came out of Kambili’s mouth, when what she actually meant to say was “I am sorry Papa broke your figurines” (p.10). She cannot say that for fear of implicating her father. The only person she communicates freely with is her brother Jaja yet, they both “use their eyes to communicate” (p.305).

Aunty Ifeoma and her house at Nsuka are symbolic in the novel, representing change and freedom from their abusive father. Nsuka started it all, Beatrice and her children gained their freedom and identity from Nsuka. It is a different world, Kambili and Jaja blossom following the footsteps of their cousins. Kambili tells the readers that "Aunty Ifeoma came the next day, in the evening, when the orange trees started to cast long" (71). The arrival of Aunty Ifeoma is compared with nature, showing us the importance of her character. Aunty Ifeoma encourages Kambili and Jaja to open up and feel free. Kambili's discovery of herself unfolds in a gradual process. First she learns to look at the nakedness of Papa-Onukwu and her cousin Amaka. However, after a few days she confesses saying: "I did not look away, although it was sinful to look at another person's nakedness" (p.175). Kambili becomes comfortable with her own body and conscious of that of others. A lot of women going through oppression just like Kambili struggle with their body and identity and until they let themselves free and get comfortable with their body they will still be stuck in their shell. Literature tries to share stories that are similar to what women go through with the aim of educating.

We also learn of Kambili's attraction to Father Amadi, the Catholic priest at Nsuka who enabled her to open up more, as she considered him a mentor and a friend. Aunty Ifeoma tries to liberate her sister-in-law Beatrice, by advising her to remain in Nsuka, get a job and take care of her children rather than return back to Eugene. Beatrice with the help of her maid Sisi, poisoned Eugene's daily tea. Eugene dies and Jaja takes the blame for it, protecting his mother from going to jail. This tells us that every human being should have the right to freedom because if this freedom is denied, there is always a tendency for a revolt. In most cases this revolt can either be a strong or a violent action that often leads to death.

In conclusion this chapter explains that female assertion has continued to be a fascinating trend among Nigerian female literature writers. As an ideology it

tends to correct the traditional image of women as uncertain human beings who are weak, voiceless and stuck in the background. On that note these writers use the central theme in their novels to indict the patriarchal domination of women and also encourage them to defend themselves irrespective of cultural norms and political situations that have denied them of their fundamental human right.

## **Chapter 4.**

### **The Power of Fictional Writing**

This chapter shows how fictional writing represents a unique mood of learning and the strong relationship between writing and learning. Writing has been considered a great collector of ideas as it is able to retain all ideas that derive from reflecting, researching and talking. The information gathered, is therefore made available to the public for consumption (Walshe 1987). To promote women's awareness towards a positive change in Nigeria literature as a form of writing tries to promote dialogue among Nigerian women, build self-esteem among Nigerian women and can be used to address gender equality and women empowerment in Nigeria. This chapter examines the various ways writing can be effectively productive in empowering Nigerian women for social change.

#### **4.1. Using Literature to Promote Dialogue among Nigerian Women**

Diversity in Nigeria reflects the richness of the country's culture. But this can lead to misunderstanding, resentment, clashes and conflicts among sociocultural and ethnic groups if not tolerated and supported. The multiethnic nature of Nigeria today necessitates instruction that promotes cultural awareness (Walker-Dalhousie, 1992). In other words, literature instructs, highlight women's common struggle and commonality over and above the ethnic cleavage that might divide them. Nigerian writers have found ways to help women have an open-mind towards others from various ethnic groups. Writers have created a new vision of cultural pluralism that supports cross-cultural empathy, sustains

ethnic cultures and furthers the empowerment of minority groups (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). To attract the attention of women, Nigerian writers enrich their novels in many ways for readers to examine and appreciate the vast culture in the country and the world at large. In other words literature can be used to promote dialogue between women in a multiethnic society and develop cultural awareness. Giving women the opportunity to think about themselves, appreciate the variety of culture and the world around them (Hammond & Gracia, 1985).

Due to globalization as well as the broad ethnic differences in the world today, there is a need to understand how diversified culture is. One compelling way to effect understanding is through incorporating multiethnic literature and conversations into classrooms, offices, conferences etc. Multiethnic literature helps to extend the knowledge of women in parallel cultures by exposing them to the differences and similarities between their culture and that of other groups (Hittleman, 1978). This way, people learn to appreciate, enjoy and develop a rooted understanding not only of their own culture, but that of others. The term globalization is used to refer to the rapidly advancing integration of many local and national economies into specific global market, which is regulated by the World Trade Organization. These development raises new questions and awareness for the humanities in general (Jaggar, 2001). The notion of globalization is similarly to that of finance, culture, information and production. In other words, globalization is not a single phenomenon, but rather a concept that represents a wide range of forces (Archibugi & Iammarino, 2010). One major goal of feminist literature is to stimulate women to be critical thinkers regardless of their culture or ethnic group. Using fiction is a way to get women to communicate about their experiences and feelings (Stuhr, 1994). Sleeter and Grant (1994), argue that literature tries to urge discourse between women in a culture where this is difficult due to multiethnic divides to,

Become analytical and critical thinkers capable of examining their life circumstances and the social stratifications that keep them and their group from fully enjoying the social and financial rewards of this country.

Or if they are members of dominant groups, it helps them become critical thinkers who are capable of examining why their groups exclusively enjoys the social and financial rewards of the nation. (p.54)

Literature incorporates themes that promotes women's awareness of the diversified culture of people. For example in Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Adah the major character moved to the United Kingdom to further her studies and career. Faced with a different culture and environment, her determination helps her to adapt to the country. In literature circles, women read a text, react and make comments based on the content of the text. Women share their experiences in groups that enable them have a social life that supports their language and thoughts. Most importantly it gives them a sense of belonging and strengthens reflective discussion. For women who find it difficult to express themselves, it affords them the opportunity to talk in a more comfortable environment (Holland & Kilpatrick, 1993). Women can relate to the theme of the text to their own personal experience thus permits them to exchange their ideas, share their emotional reactions and beliefs as well as negotiate meaning within "a non-threatening community of learners" (Holland & Kilpatrick 1993, p. 111).

When women are able to interpret the overall theme of the text, they reflect, listen and relate their own life to the text read. When this materialize they are most likely to reshape and change their view about the world. In other words, conversations help women to broaden their awareness and develop their learning skills. Dialogue lead to making women compassionate, respectful and supportive towards each other. In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's conversations with her cousins and Father Amadi at Nsuka helped her loosen up as she tells the story of her troubled family. Through literature women can become more informed about concerning issues in their community and the globe. Issues like certain cultural practices, domestic violence, poverty and sexism that keep supressing Nigerian women.

Holland and Kilpatrick (1993), explain that every culture has an essential story that has a meaning and purpose. In literature, stories appear in various forms such as; “myth, fables, proverbs, films, poems, music, plays, novels, histories, biographies and case studies” (p. 302). Narrative as a technique has been used by writers to enhance multiethnic practices among women. Most of women’s social improvement occurs as a result of listening and understanding the stories of people’s lives. Stories constitute the basic element used to show how people in any culture, come to understand themselves and how such understanding can have an impact on their behaviour and relationship towards one another (Holland, 1991; O’Hanlon & Weiner-Davis, 1988). In order words fictional writing or literature tries to create awareness and dialogue among Nigerian women from various culture and ethnic background.

One vital approach to appreciating and creating cultural awareness is through the form of narrative analysis. This is an approach borrowed from the critical study of literature and rooted in the theory of social constructivism (Goldstein, 1988; Scott, 1989). Constructivism as a school of thought probes the link between knowledge and reality. It comes from the presumption that people do not apprehend external reality directly but rather form images or situations to relate to their individual experiences (Glaserfeld, 1984). Using tales, anecdotes, legends and myths individuals can develop a narrative about their own personal lives which can help them come to terms with who they are, where they are headed and how they can cope with success, failures, joy, pain and love. These fictional novels serve as a tool to organize actions and incidents around certain values and decisions made. In some cases these stories serve as a model to copy or avoid. Like the character of Adah in *Second Class Citizen*, whose dedication and personality is a good example for young girls to emulate. These novels are coordinated by means of plots, setting, themes and characterization which reflect cultural values. The plot show the readers how the participant battle to make sense of their experience. As the novel develops, the characters

endeavour to make meaning of the significance of their experiences and to express the worth hidden in their characters (Holland & Kilpatrick 1993). Although individuals develop their own personal framework of meaning, women draw on basic values, themes and plots offered by their culture and subculture. Some women have been socialized into restraining and stereotyped subcultures. Literature helps women to recognize their values and limitations (Daloz, 1988; Polkinghorne, 1988).

The meditative observation and study of numerous fictions across many cultures is a practical and effective way for promoting women's awareness towards change in Nigeria. When women from diversified cultural and ethnic backgrounds get exposed to the stories of another culture, they can broaden their own capacity which would enable them to tolerate and acknowledge the different ways people establish meaning and express values in their lives. Fiction can serve as a way to enrich women's gratitude and tolerance for their culture and the culture of others. It also helps to close the gap across differences and links women of various communities together for a good cause. Furthermore, stories attempt to give an innovative and empowering path to strengthening women from various ethnic groups (Walker-Dalhouse, 1992).

#### **4.2. Using Fictional Writing to Address Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment**

Fictional writing can be a useful tool for promoting greater tolerance and improved communication among men and women. Literary works have the ability to make readers identify with the characters in the stories irrespective of culture, religion and class. Allen Merriam (1988), writes that when this happens it creates emotional involvement in the "actions, feelings and motivations of people" in the novel (p. 61). Moreover, literature often appeals to and describes the situation of women in the cultural and social context of the story, thereby reinforcing

awareness in the reader's values, customs and communication patterns that may be different from his or her own. Writers like Adichie, Emecheta and Nwapa in trying to address gender related issues in their stories negotiate the creation of their fictional characters. They deploy several strategies to show the specificity of their positionality (Nnaemeka, 1994). Nwapa's *Efuru* attempts to create a young, free-spirited and independent woman in the character of Efuru who breaks tradition by living with a man, Adizua, before paying her dowry. They saw each other often but he "had no money for the dowry" and she "told him not to bother about the dowry" (Nwapa 1966, p.7). The author attempts to create a female major character who questions and breaks tradition. The 'distinguished Efuru' is a strong-willed and industrious woman who often gets what she wants. She refused to be a farmer like her husband she tells him "I am not cut out for farm work, I am going to trade" (p.10). And trade she did and was very successful.

Gender has become an issue of concern in the academic field. Gender is an institution that is fixed in all social practice of everyday life and social organization. Unless we acknowledge and accept difference, we cannot validate inequality (Lorber, 1994). Gender inequality refers to the uneven treatment, attitude or impression of an individual based on their gender (Kolawole, 2002). On the other hand gender equality does not mean suppressing some voices so that others may be obviously heard, it also does not demand the compromising of academic standards in the name of egalitarianism. Rather equality provides new standards to accommodate, accept and groom differences. Equality fosters the individual voices in the society, giving women an identity which would upgrade their confidence in their own authority and the society (Caywood & Overing, 1987). Having and recognizing one's identity unleashes the creative side of an individual. And literature has the ability to do that because one has the freedom to relate to a certain character in a novel. Currently gender is being expressed in a greater variety of ways, and gender is being used alongside with identity. Gender makes a distinction not only in the life of an individual but also in

the institution of society and in the language made use of, by which an individual is identified with. Gender is a complex term because within a given cultural, geographical and historical context one can still be identified as “masculine” and “feminine” (Nielsen 1996).

Feminist literary writing intends to facilitate the reader’s learning about gender and identity by enabling them to adopt, evaluate and integrate their own gained experiences and information. When thoughts are transferred from book to head, meaning is made and it permits inner dialogue (Roth 1985). This encourages the reader to develop his or her own views and voice. Increasingly interdisciplinary studies including Women’s Studies as well as multicultural studies are broadening their syllabus to cover more issues related to gender. Women Studies because of its critical viewpoint towards knowledge in the traditional disciplines, has open for multiply oppressed groups especially in its interdisciplinary approach and its orientation towards social change and empowerment (Nielsen 1996).

In writing about gender equality, authors aim to create an interactive forum for readers to ask certain questions. Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* portrays the character of Aunty Ifeoma a widow, but yet a successful university professor who encourages her children to question the authorities. She introduces her niece Kambili to a liberal way of life. Emecheta’s *Second Class Citizen* tells the story of Adah who initially was refused from going to school because she was a girl but Adah again breaks tradition and insists on getting an education like her brothers. Her zeal and hard work shows that anyone can be successful regardless of gender.

### **4.3. Using Literature to Build Self-Esteem among Nigerian Women**

The number of women going through difficulties in Nigeria are growing by the minute. These women due to the difficulties they pass through are usually unmotivated with academics, public functions or employment. The question now is how can fictional writing get the general public to be aware of such issues affecting women in the country? What kind of literature projects can be used to facilitate in building self-esteem among Nigerian women? How can literature engage the interest of this women? The concept of using literature as a psychoeducational device to improve the self-concept of Nigerian women with low self-esteem is not a new approach (Gerber and Harris 1983; Lindsey and Firth 1981).

Research conducted suggests that there is a relationship between gender attitude and self-esteem. Also many of the studies and research have been conducted and debated from the male point of view and very little is known about the African women's ideology (Barnes, 1972). There has been a constant struggle of resistance in the various forms of oppression and discrimination inflicted in the lives of African women, most importantly Nigerian women (Eaton, Livingston & McAdoo, 2010). However, this resistance and advocacy has been influenced by various groups in the country interested in showing how best the biased situation against Nigerian women can be approached and phased out. This discrimination against Nigerian women can be traced back to the culture and history of the people, which provides an insight into the causes of past and present situation of the Nigerian woman. (Adiche, 2003).

Nigerian female writers suggest that women should possess their country, since they share a common heritage, culture, religion, language, tradition and ethnicity with men. They also advocate that women should be encouraged to shape their own destinies and be in charge of their own economic, social and

political institution (Nkrumah, 1970). Also there are a number of informative concepts used in the literary field on self-esteem which links to achievement. Such concepts include the locus of control, learned helplessness and the organising categories of attribution theory, stable or unstable, and internal or external” (Griffiths, 1993). Each of this places women in the position that enables them to access themselves as achievers.

Many social scientist query whether psychological health is possible for the low self-esteem of Nigerian women given the intersection of culture, social inequality and class (Grier & Cobbs, 1968; Kardiner & Ovessey, 1951). Research has hinted at cultural mindset as a factor related to healthier psychological outcomes in Africans. Morwenna Griffiths (1993) explains that the notion and theory of self-esteem has come into awareness through psychology, with the help of two prominent psychologists, William James and Carl Rogers. William James’ original opinion that self-esteem is the “ratio of one’s pretensions” has been further interpreted by other psychologists as a theory that self-esteem is best understood as the “discrepancy between ideal self and the self-image” (p. 301). Carl Rogers a well-known psychologist also expended on the work of James, but he came up with something different. He places more attention on both the giving of unconditional regard to individuals in order to give them the drive to create their own goals and aspirations in life, and on the role played by individual affinity (Griffiths 1993). One familiar thing with Carl Rogers’ theory is the fact that these strands are concerned with achievement and what one’s self can do.

Self-esteem and achievement are closely related because ideal self tends to be in terms of what can be attained like skills, morals, acquired knowledge or state of mind. Self-esteem and the ideal self can be seen as both mental and physical potentials a woman seeks to gain or realize, such as reading, writing, sports, communication and a well cultured behavior. High self-esteem is necessary for an individual and in this case a woman with high self-esteem is

capable of being successful and proud of it (Lawrence, 1987). Just like Auntie Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus* whose high self-esteem made her outstanding and her home became the foundation of growth and self-reflection.

Self-esteem is defined as an individual's intuitive assessment of the self. Self-esteem consists of one's perception of self-worth: one's feeling of values, one's judgment, morals and personal attitude (Eaton, Livingston & McAdoo, 2010). Early research of African psychological development and well-being targeted black self-esteem. The study proposed that Africans especially women idealized the Western world and as a result suffered from low self-esteem (Clark & Clark, 1947; Kardiner & Ovessey, 1951). The generalization that Africans suffered from low self-esteem went unchallenged until the late 1960s and early 1970s when African researchers denounced this hypothesis on the grounds of the concept and methodology used by the previous researchers (Banks, 1972; McAdoo, 1985).

Literature as a psychoeducational technique is a project used to transform the attitude and self-esteem of women with low self-esteem. In the case of women with problematic family situations, literature has been adopted to prevent the self-concept problem, and to help women cope with abuse (Carla 1978; Randolph and Gredler 1985; Watson 1980). However, for example the use of literature in a classroom environment with women who are struggling with learning problems, would go a long way in assisting this group of young women in improving themselves. Darcy Miller (1994) writes that the literature project uses the women themselves as "curricular informants," a practice "employed in the whole language approach to reading" (p. 207). The needs of these women are considered and carefully studied to ensure that the appropriate novels are written and used to address their life experiences and concerns. The novels selected in the curriculum revolve around both young and old characters, who symbolize qualities such as hope, love, courage, loyalty, tolerance, intelligence, self-reliance, perseverance, warmth, confidence, and dedication.

Just like the media, relevant issues such as rape, drugs, homelessness, widowhood, dysfunctional family relationship, unemployment, homelessness, poverty, teenage pregnancy, sexism, physical and sexual abuse are the subject or themes that run throughout the novels in the literature project curriculum. Like any given life situation the major character triumph over any challenging circumstance to become confident, successful, courageous and independent. Just like Nwapa's *Efuru* and Emecheta's *Adah*, who regardless of all the adversities they faced they both were very determined to be prosperous which they did (Nwapa, 1966; Emecheta, 1974). The priority of these authors is to improve the self-esteem of women and their impression of themselves and most importantly assist them in building their self-confidence (Miller, 1994). In a classroom setting, first the instructor interviews each student to know each person's preference for studying. In order to gather valuable information to aid in picking relevant topics and novels for discussion the following questions are asked by the teacher; what do you intend to learn from the novel? What kind of things are you interested in? What would you like to read about? What are you passionate about? (Corcoran, 1987). In Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* Auntie Ifeoma tries to ask her sister-in-law Beatrice about Eugene's abusive attack on the family. She does this to find a solution and an end to the abuse.

These questions are asked to gather information about the female students and to assess their needs. The instructor obtains and develops from this information which he or she uses. All novels are read orally and the group size is kept to a minimum to facilitate full participation. This helps to inspire critical thinking and engagement in the classroom. These questions are also related to the needs of the women in question but the strategy of the project requires them to relate the incidents and characters in the novel to their own life story (Corcoran, 1987). Another way to boost the self-esteem of women is by developing activities that emphasize the concepts illustrated in the novel. These activities are to further critical reasoning and making connections through

intellectual processes such as “picturing and imaging, anticipating and retrospection, engagement and construction and valuing and evaluating” (Miller, 1994)

## **Chapter 5.**

### **Conclusions**

Nigerian writers, in their individual rights and artistic style, are competent artists who present political, economic and social message that compel their readers to reach for change in themselves and in their society. Ayo Kehinde (2008), explains that these writers use their text to recur the “tremors of anguished souls, lamenting the fate of their country” (p. 356). They have a common ambition and that is to use their text as a medium to communicate, castigate, satirize and address the ills in the country and try to create a platform for a positive change.

Nigerian women still experience oppression; traditional institutions and marriage continue to be a burden on them. There is a major need to deconstruct the stereotypes, belief and views that tend to obstruct the progress of Nigerian women. Female writers in their advocacy for women have created dynamic and enlightened protagonists with a voice to express themselves rather than being vulnerable.

The three text reveal that the ideal of independence and democracy in the country is not genuinely practiced. But regardless there is still hope for women only if the matters affecting women are taken seriously into consideration. Frantz Fanon (1963) points out that each “generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it or betray it” (p. 166). Fictional writing awakens the conscience of women in Nigeria by reviewing the socio-cultural and political happening in the country that affects them. Uchechukwu Ewelukwa (2002) insists

that, this is relevant because the study of women as a vital social force, as well as the treatment of their wealth and woes is an “intrinsic part of the overall social dynamics of every society” (p.430).

The primary intention of fictional writing is not only to inform, entertain and educate, but also to make an effort in discovering ways to change the society especially the ideology of the citizens. The Nigerian literary text have been sensitive and attentive towards the predicaments of women and have unmasked their afflictions. The pattern of writing reflects the central theme of the text and as spokespersons and mediators they are responsible for the masses (Dasyuva, 1997). Fiction provides more truth about the world, life, and even about the reader. Fiction tries to get the truth because stories are light and light is precious in a world so dark. Stories matter because they can be used to empower, humanize and repair the broken dignity of people (Adichie, 2003).

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